

Toxic Leadership in the Military Profession

by

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TOXIC LEADERSHIP IN THE MILITARY PROFESSION

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ABSTRACT

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The military wants to rid its top ranks of toxic leaders. A survey of more than 22,630 leaders from the rank of E-5 through O-6 and Department of Defense (DoD) civilians showed that roughly one in five sees his or her superior as toxic or unethical.¹ As an institution of high ethics and values, DoD must pay particular attention to toxic leadership because of the serious consequences caused by leadership failure. Senior leaders must consider whether, minor adjustments are required or the situation necessitates major change to current policies. All services in the military can be dramatically affected by a small number of toxic leaders. However, most strategic leaders are viewed quite positively, and balance individual subordinate needs with meeting demanding mission requirements, despite a blistering operational tempo over the past 10 years. The one consistent attribute effective leaders have in common is a strong set of core values, and among them include character, ethics, and integrity. Strong leaders use their core values as a set of guiding principles or moral compass. This paper highlights the nature, frequency, severity, and trepidations of toxic leadership in the military and recommends three strategies for adoption to shape a more positive and effective leadership culture and policy for the future.

TOXIC LEADERSHIP IN THE MILITARY PROFESSION

Army leaders must establish and sustain a climate that ensures people are treated with dignity and respect.

— U.S. Army Field Manual 22-100²

Organizations at the strategic, operational and tactical levels can be severely damaged by a small number of toxic leaders. In recent months the topic of toxic leadership has gained momentum and senior strategic leaders are applying more emphasis toward its reduction and elimination. It is not surprising that there have been few studies that actually examine the kinds of negative leadership behaviors service members experience and even fewer that examine the experiences of senior officers. The terms bad, destructive, and toxic leadership are used interchangeably in this paper to describe interpersonal behaviors by those in leadership positions that negatively impact subordinates.³

What does bad or toxic leadership mean? Does it mean leadership that is immoral or unethical? Does it mean leadership that is incompetent or ineffective? Questions like these have no easy answers. Bad or toxic leadership is a phenomenon so ubiquitous it's a wonder that bookstores shelves are not heavily loaded with books on the subject, ---but they are not. Maybe everyone avoids the subject because toxic leadership is located in what Harlan Cleveland refers to as the untidy world of human relations.⁴ Those engaged in the study of leadership seem almost to collude to avoid the elephant in the room, toxic leadership. Leaders go through life accentuating the positive and eliminating the negative in order to create a healthier positive command climate.⁵ A qualitative study conducted at the Army War College in 2003 indicated that when given an opportunity to discuss it, military officers provided many anecdotal accounts of

experiences with destructive leadership. So why is there so much interest in toxic leadership? The simple answer is organizations realize these types of leaders reduce organizational effectiveness and cost institutions large amounts of money.⁶

Examples of toxic leadership and superior leadership are provided to show evidence of the implications of when leaders are doing the wrong thing or when superiors are observed doing the right thing. The bottom line is that organizations tend to pay relatively little attention to toxic leadership. Therefore, this paper implores senior leaders to address toxic leadership at the strategic level to determine whether a new systematic approach is needed, if changes in DoD assessment and leader development policy need revision, or if simple reforms are necessary at our academic institutions and military academies to significantly reduce toxic leadership in the future.

This research paper addresses several important questions: first, how does the Army define leadership and what is the definition of a toxic leader? Second, what are the behaviors, characteristics and symptoms displayed by both toxic and superior leaders? Third, what strategies can the military adopt to reduce and eliminate toxic behavior?

The Department of Defense defines leadership as influencing people by providing purpose, direction, and motivation while operating to accomplish the mission and improving the organization. A leader is anyone who by virtue of assumed role or assigned responsibility inspires and influences people to accomplish organizational goals.⁷ Leaders motivate people both inside and outside the chain of command to pursue actions, focus thinking, and shape decisions for the greater good of the organization.

Toxic leaders are characterized as leaders who take part in destructive behaviors and show signs of dysfunctional personal characteristics. It is a leadership approach that harms people and eventually the organization through the poisoning of enthusiasm, creativity, autonomy, and innovative expression. General Martin Dempsey, now the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff defined toxic leaders as commanders who put their own needs first, micro-managed subordinates, behaved in a mean spirited manner or displayed poor decision making.⁸

George E. Reed, Colonel, U.S. Army, retired, is an associate professor at the University of San Diego's School of Leadership and Education Sciences. He is a respected author of several articles on the topic of toxic leaders. He came up with a three-part definition of toxic leadership and what strategic leaders should look for in assessing other leaders. He concluded toxic leaders show an apparent lack of concern for the well-being of subordinates. Second, their personality or interpersonal technique negatively affects the organizational climate. Third, they're toxic if a conviction is held by subordinates that the leader is motivated primarily by self-interest "designed to advance them over the carcasses of their subordinates." To suffering subordinates, toxic leaders represent a daily challenge that can result in unnecessary organizational stress, negative values, and hopelessness. Toxic leaders are anathema to the health of units. They can be quite responsive to missions from higher headquarters and obsequious to peers and especially to superiors, but their deficiencies are evident to subordinates. Toxic leaders rise to their stations in life over the carcasses of those who work for them. They run their units into the ground, casting a wake of destruction obvious to those who assume leadership positions behind them. Military service members serving under toxic

leaders can become disenchanted with their respective service or, worse, might take the successful toxic leader as an example to emulate.⁹

Stanley Foster Reed, publisher of *The Toxic Executive*, defines toxic leaders as those who abuse the power they wield, particularly over subordinates, to serve and satisfy personal ends. These ends are usually inconsistent with the organization's ends. These toxic leaders range from the super-toxics, who get up every morning mistrusting everyone, to the career toxics, who hate and mistrust only those people they must work with, to the sub-toxics who are just beginning to learn how to be mean, rotten, deceitful or non-caring.¹⁰ They disseminate their poison through over-control. They define leadership as being in control. Bad or toxic leadership is poisoned with posturing, self-importance and pedanticism. Toxic leaders are maladjusted, malcontent, and often malevolent. They can be very malicious to subordinates, peers and to organizations in general. They succeed by tearing others down. They glory in turf protection, fighting, and controlling rather than uplifting subordinates.

Marcia Whicker, author of *Toxic Leaders*, states toxic leaders are red light or spotlight leaders. Their leadership inhibits organizational growth causing progress to screech to a grinding halt. These leaders have a well-disguised sense of personal inadequacy with a focus on selfish values, cleverness at deception and low ethical and moral framework.

In direct contrast, the superior leaders are great moral leaders. They can be trusted to put the objectives and interests of the organization and the well-being of their juniors first. They value self-esteem, the esteem of others, and self-actualization both for themselves and for their soldiers.¹¹ It is essential to reduce these negative trends

and remove poor leaders immediately to take care of our most precious resource; our service members and their families.

The toxic leader's self-confidence, magnetic enthusiasm, and unrelenting drive to attain prestige and power enable them to climb the rungs of power and to be effective in some aspects of leadership. Toxic leaders take these attributes to the extreme without regard to the well-being of their subordinates and their families. Furthermore, ruthlessness enables toxic leaders to manipulate others to achieve their goals and steal credit for the work of others. Although lacking empathetic concern for others, toxic leaders seem to have the tactical and technical expertise that enable them to assess whom they can manipulate and what levers they can pull to control them. Toxic leaders intense ambition, lack of restraint, and ability to charm superiors, manipulate people, and forge quick relationships can make them masters of organizational politics.¹²

In an article published on 25 June 2011 by Greg Jaffe, who covers the military for the Washington Post, states the military worries about toxic leaders in its ranks. He claims that a major U.S. Army survey of leadership conducted by the Center for Army Leadership found that more than 80 percent of Army officers and sergeants had directly observed a toxic leader in the last year and that about 20 percent of the respondents said that they had worked directly for one. Toxic leaders begin with charm, and then manipulate and mistreat leaving followers worse off than they found them. The survey mentioned was completed by over 22,000 Army leaders. The survey was administered during a year when the Army had removed or disciplined several brigade commanders who were en-route or returning from wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.¹³

The Army in 2011 has relieved four brigade commanders, the highest number since 2005. At least two of the firings had nothing to do with misconduct or battlefield performance, but were related to toxic leadership issues.¹⁴ What are some examples of toxic leadership and how are they defined? In the book, *The Toxic Executive*, by Stanley Foster Reed, he highlights 26 typical toxic executive behaviors. For the purposes of this research, three main characteristics stand out as it applies to the military. The top three behavioral features include the Micro-Manager (micromanagement with a hidden agenda), the Pretender (rejection of others opinions and ideas exhibiting unethical behavior), and the Egomaniac (manipulation of people and things).¹⁵

The Micro-Manager

The first principal behavioral trait of a toxic military leader is micro-management invading the privacy of others. Over-energetic leaders are more interested in the private affairs of their subordinates, peers, and superiors than they are in moving the organization forward. The micro-manager tends to search through desks and office spaces of subordinates looking for problems. The toxic leader has no regard for the property, feelings, dignity, or privacy of others. This is the type of leader that reads others mail whether public or private assuming that there is something the subordinate is hiding from them. They listen to phone calls and believe it is their right to monitor or invade the privacy of others. Believe it or not, this behavior with toxic leaders is quite common.¹⁶ Toxic leaders believe that everyone is interested in everyone else's private affairs. Toxic leaders as micro-managers always seem to have something to conceal. Stanley Foster Reed states that toxic executives have a hidden agenda. Toxic leaders twist things to their own advantage and these types of micro-managers are the ones

that lock their desks and seldom let you visit their homes. They have files squirreled away always worrying that they are the next to be fired or relieved. They are the ones that have something to hide which usually results in some type of unethical or inappropriate behavior.¹⁷

A Fort Bragg, North Carolina battalion commander and his top enlisted adviser were removed from their jobs in Afghanistan and sent home for using poor judgment. Lieutenant Colonel Frank Jenio and Command Sergeant Major Bert Puckett were leaders of the 2nd Battalion, 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment, part of the 82nd Airborne Division's 4th Brigade Combat Team, which deployed in August to Afghanistan. An investigation found their actions were of poor judgment which fostered a command climate that was not consistent with Army values. Spokesman, Lieutenant Colonel Clarence Counts wrote in an e-mail from Afghanistan in a response to questions, "We are a values-based and professional organization committed to Army values and this change reflects a continuous commitment to adhere to the highest standards of excellence while maintaining good order and discipline." Counts did not say what actions specifically led to the decision.¹⁸ The next type of toxic leader is the pretender.

The Pretender

The pretender can be characterized as the toxic leader that hates to hear others ideas, doesn't like bad news, and is usually involved in some type of unethical and immoral activity comprising the values of the organization for his or her own self-interest. These types of leaders do not use active listening skills because they know it all. They do not seek counsel from subordinates and those in their inner circle. Toxic leaders do not learn from mistakes and are not open to feedback. Without active

listening and behaving in an ethical manner, the toxic leader creates a climate and culture of dysfunction and negativity throughout the organization. In an abusive climate one must be careful with a good idea because it is generally met with immediate discouragement, with outright rejection, and malevolent obstructionism. Toxic leaders hate inside people with great ideas because the ideas aren't their own and they do not want these people to get involved in their personal business.¹⁹

For example, the U.S. Navy relieved several commanding officers in 2011 that demanded a response from the Chief of Naval Operations. He wrote an unusual memo to all potential commanders reminding them of their responsibilities. This year, 2011, 14 commanding officers have been relieved of duty, compared to 17 officers in 2010. The highest number was in 2003 when 26 commanding officers were relieved of duty. The memo provided to CNN heavily emphasized professional ethics and personal accountability.

While the cause of some of the commanders being relieved of duty was stated by the Navy as loss of confidence in ability to command without specific details, other cases included allegations of drunk driving, inappropriate personal relationships, mistreating sailors, and failing to properly handle a loaded weapon. The officers ranged in rank from Commanders, to Captains, and one Rear Admiral who was relieved of command. The Rear Admiral was held accountable for failing to hold himself responsible for the professional decorum of the ship, the obligation to play an active role in the command climate for the crew, provide adequate guidance and oversight, and not taking prudent measures to ensure compliance within Navy standards.²⁰ The final characteristic of toxic leaders is defined as the egomaniac.

The Egomaniac

Toxic leaders are highly competitive. They want to get to the top of the leadership ladder at all cost, even if it hurts the soldiers beneath them. To the toxic leader, all other individuals are slower, less competent, and less effective. If any of these three traits are prevalent, then the other person is perceived as a threat to the toxic leader. Priorities are established by the toxic leader and are set in this precedence: ideas come first (as long as it came from the toxic leader), then people, and things last. One would think that toxic leaders, who so mistreat ideas and people, would not abuse things but they do.²¹ These toxic leaders with huge egos hate to be wrong, do not like bad news, and do not welcome better competition. These are the very leaders that drive their soldiers in the ground and do not see the implications on morale and well-being. Everyone has likely seen this type of leader at one time in their life.

For example, COL Frank Zachar was relieved of Command of the 172nd Infantry Brigade after just over seven months in command. The reason given by the Acting V Corps Commander, BG Allen Batschelet, was “loss of confidence in his ability to command.” Curiously, BG Batschelet added that, ““There weren’t any illegal, immoral or unethical activities,” and, “His (Zachar’s) leadership style wasn’t really effective and over time the command here lost confidence in his ability to command.” An article in Military Times asserts that Zachar was not exactly a popular commander with the troops. Four of Zachar’s six battalion commanders and four of his five sergeants major said they felt he had a negative leadership style, according to an investigation into the command climate. BG Jimmie Jaye Wells, who conducted U.S. Army Europe’s investigation of the brigade, concluded in his report that Zachar “demonstrated arrogance, deception and threatening behavior,” and that the command climate was “at

best ineffective, and at worst toxic.” Some Soldiers, writing anonymously, were very critical of COL Zachar. Quotes are below.²²

He was a monster to work for, unless you were one of his favorites.

He took a perverse joy in making life absolutely miserable. It was disgusting and disheartening to experience.

Zachar ran his troops into the ground, every morning I would wake up saying to myself “today is going to suck”.

Given how destructive toxic leaders are to organizations, it is incredible how common toxic leaders are, but are rarely reported. Knowing that, then how do toxic leaders survive and move up?

Toxic leaders survive in organizations because service members often fail to speak out about their abuses. Most service members across the military have witnessed a toxic leader during their time serving their country. Toxic leaders usually direct their most inappropriate behavior at subordinates and not at the superiors who determine their fate. One of the main reasons toxic leaders are not identified is due to the fear of reprisal. If soldiers do speak out against a toxic leader they worry about the unintended consequences. Furthermore, when subordinates equivocate, there is a strong tendency to believe the superior first over the subordinate. This is a huge dilemma in the military and is recognized by senior leaders. Superior senior leaders expect service members to report inappropriate behavior. For example, former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and General George C. Marshall expected leaders and subordinates to have the courage to step forward with candor. Former Secretary Gates’ speech to West point cadets accentuates this point when he stated:

I encourage you to take on the mantle of fearless, thoughtful, but loyal dissent when the situation calls for it. And agree with the articles or not, senior officers should embrace such dissent as healthy dialogue and

protect and advance those considerably more junior who are taking on the mantle.²³

Senior leaders should relate stories about important events and people in which they highlight how a senior leader received important advice from an assertive subordinate. For example, General George C. Marshall often told the story about how in 1938, then Brigadier General Marshall surprisingly told President Roosevelt that he disagreed with the President's idea to build airplanes in response to Nazi aggression. On the way out of the meeting the others at the meeting expressed sympathy to Marshall for ending his career (because of his disagreement with the President). Later, when it came time to pick an Army Chief of Staff, President Roosevelt selected Marshall over thirty-four officers his senior. This story highlights the value Roosevelt placed on candor, and from inference, the value Marshall also placed on this quality to step forward.²⁴ Although poor leaders lack compassion and are insensitive to the needs of their followers, not all leadership is toxic.

Toxic leadership and high levels of self-confidence can be misunderstood and viewed as strong leadership. Leadership is not a popularity contest and is fundamentally about people. People are more likely to follow someone they like and respect.²⁵ Advocates believe that strong leadership flows from competence. Therefore those that have this sense of competency, also exude confidence that is driven by ambition and allows these leaders to make sacrifices for the good of the organization. The most important first step in identifying toxic leadership is to recognize the behaviors, characteristics and symptoms.

Surveys have shown that 82 percent of military officers and non-commissioned officers are doing the right things. Leadership is a powerful force.²⁶ Superior leadership

is pervasive, persuasive, and persistent. Superior leaders are the ones that enable organizations to flourish in progress, growth, and victory on the battlefield and in garrison.²⁷ A loud, decisive, demanding leader is not necessarily toxic. A leader with a soft voice and façade of sincerity can also be toxic. Senior leaders recognize that the military consists of countless numbers of hard driving, high achieving, compassionate leaders who understand the importance of good climate.²⁸ A few leaders that come to mind are General Martin Dempsey, General Raymond Odierno, Admiral Jonathan Greenert, General Norton Schwartz, and General James Amos to name a few.

The role of the strategic leader is central to all military operations. Strategic leaders from all service components exhibit outstanding virtue and the most successful leaders embody values and ethics of character, charisma, and candor.

Character

Character is defined as a person's moral and ethical qualities that helps determine what is right and gives a leader motivation to do what is appropriate, regardless of the circumstances or the consequences. An informed ethical conscience consistent with the military values strengthens leaders to make the right choices when faced with tough issues. Since leaders seek to do what is right and inspire others to do the same, they must embody these values.²⁹ General (retired) Montgomery C. Meigs, former Commander of the U.S. Army Combined Arms Center and Commandant of the Army's Staff College stated that historians and commentators cite character as the essential ingredient of enlightened senior leadership. The basis for his argument is that for senior leaders, character is one aspect that clearly differentiates strategic leadership from middle management.³⁰

The culture of the military continues to place even more emphasis on personal character than on personal expertise. Trustworthiness, of course, remains the essential medium in any leadership situation. It is more greatly prized under the extraordinary demanding circumstances typical of the operational military environment. Although military organizations have experienced the same leap in complexity as the rest of the world, with technical competence obviously a contemporary requirement, the bedrock of a service member's professional reputation is character.³¹ Strategic leaders maintain a sense of right and wrong and their behavior defines character. They create a favorable foundation in military bearing and personal conduct and exude honesty and exuberance in their performance of duty by treating everyone with dignity and respect. One thing strategic leaders have in common is a strong set of values and among the best you will find is integrity. Strong leaders use core values as a set of guiding principles. If they work for someone else, they understand the need to ensure that the corporations' and their core values are in concert with one another. For example, Enron, Hollinger, WorldCom, Boeing, and Freddy Mac all are prime examples of violations of character. The result of these lapses in character produced serious consequences. Other corporations no longer trust them, do not want to cooperate and negotiate, and has cost a great deal economically across the globe.³²

Doing the right thing is good and doing it for the right reason, with the right goal is even better. Unethical behavior quickly destroys organizational morale and cohesion at the strategic level. Leaders begin to see the effects of how our guiding principles as a profession in upholding ethical and behavioral standards may subside due to violations of personal integrity. Poor choices strategic leaders make usually undermine the trust

and confidence of the organization and possibly among the American populace.³³ It is said that people of character, candor, and charisma must possess the desire to act ethically in all situations. Superior leaders demonstrate lots of energy and are extroverted people with a high level of charisma.

Charisma

Charismatic leadership is a special quality that inspires devotion or fascination among subordinates, peers, and superiors alike. Charismatic leaders do these things constantly in large and small ways. Cumulatively, these actions change attitudes, responses and methodologies within the organization. These leaders get people to want to follow them. Maybe it starts out with their physical appearance or it's a perception of competency, but in the end, leadership is ratified in the hearts and minds of the subordinate. Charismatic leaders add value to the organization. They add energy to the organization and some leaders, merely because of the way they react with other people, consume energy from within the organization.³⁴

Many toxic leaders view themselves as charismatic leaders without having any real personal charisma. For example, some politicians and military officers have become charismatic leaders by creating a unique image and exaggerated reputation using a variety of behaviors, some natural, some exaggerated and some developed, to inspire people to follow. As the apparent charisma of these leaders inspires more and more followers; many of whom admire or fawn over them, praise everything they do and excuse, forgive, and shift the blame for any mistakes. They begin to think that they can do no wrong, such as General Sickles at Gettysburg, which nearly led to disaster!. Soon, to satisfy their personal or professional desires, they begin to push the boundaries of appropriate behavior, ethics or the law.

If one thinks about the famous charismatic leaders of the past, strategic leaders have proclaimed a lofty or idealized vision as their goal for the nation, organization or the followers themselves. A good example of this is President Kennedy's, response to the perceived crisis posed by Sputnik: "Put a Man on the Moon in Ten Years."³⁵ The final superior leadership attribute where leaders demonstrate a sense of frankness and honesty is defined as candor.

Candor

The personality and moral courage of the leader is a powerful factor in the leadership equation. The leader must possess candor and create a system of active listening that allows expressions of disagreements and outrage by officers. If leaders do not have the courage to allow disagreement with candor and only squelch negative feedback then the climate created is not conducive to a military encouraging candor. For example, Napoleon came to the battle of Waterloo with an ego fed by innumerable successes. His charismatic leadership had enabled him, after his escape from Elba, to create an army that threatened to reconfigure the map of Europe. But at a breakfast with his marshals before the battle, his arrogance set the stage for a monumental defeat. He angrily dismissed criticisms of his plan of attack. A prisoner of past triumphs, unwilling to listen and use candor with his trusted and battle-tested staff, he launched a fatally flawed attack. Even today, one hundred and eighty years later, Waterloo is synonymous with defeat.³⁶

If toxic leadership exists at the senior strategic levels of the military, what are some specific strategic recommendations the military can implement to help reduce or eliminate toxic leaders? The following three strategies are recommendations for the Department of Defense to adopt in the next three to five years to reduce toxicity and

create a better culture of leaders. These strategies will assist in identifying the characteristics of toxic leaders, provide valuable oversight, reduce abuse and maltreatment, and ultimately increase leadership education in academic institutions across all services to shape the military profession of the future.

Advisory Committee of Generals (ACG)

The first strategy for DoD to adopt is toward the creation of an Advisory Committee of General Officers defined as the ACG. The ACG would consist of retired General Officers, Senior Non-Commissioned Officers (NCO), Active Duty General Officers and Senior Executive Service (SES) civilians to coach, teach and mentor all future brigade and battalion commanders. Each of these senior leaders from all services as part of the Advisory Committee will be the eyes and ears of the military and at the heart of decision-making in both peacetime and war. They bring extensive experience and will provide deep insight into how our leaders perform and treat their organizations. The superior leaders of the ACG would provide a balance in addressing military demands for Command (CSL) selection to lead our military into the future. They would not micromanage commanders and leaders and would only provide advisement to the senior leadership to make more educated and accurate decisions in the selection of future commanders. The ACG's mission would be to provide mentorship through in-person observation over a prolonged period of time, conducting multiple interviews with superiors, peers, and subordinates within the appropriate commands. The end product would be a comprehensive assessment linked to the Officer and NCO Evaluation Report for the Commanders supervisor.

Future battlefield environments will place additional pressures on developing leaders at a rapid pace in a new broader communicative environment. The ACG would

assist leaders in leader development providing professional expertise, maturity, and mentorship. The ACG could provide a sense of collaboration within the unit to assist with training and leader development while reducing toxicity. The ACG would be a developmental aid to effectively support senior leader objectives with evaluation. This new committee will be a combat multiplier because it boosts positive leadership behavior and reduces or eliminates toxicity. They would act as advisors and evaluators to provide senior DoD leadership candid feedback.³⁷ This proactive approach provides a detailed evaluation over a longer period of time and provides an honest assessment of the leader combining the evaluation with the new officer evaluation report. This offers another point of view for the immediate rater and senior rater with an unbiased assessment for senior leaders to take into consideration to assist in the reduction or removal of toxic leader behavior. The Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) Commander General Robert Cone is quoted in the new Army Directive 2011-16:

Senior level leaders continue to develop themselves, mentor others, and encourage leaders to seek geo-political, cultural, language, and information skills. The character of our senior leaders withstands public scrutiny and the enormous pressures brought to bear by the scope of their authority and the impact of their decisions. They develop and describe a broad vision – establishing frameworks upon which lower level leaders build. Senior level leaders possess a sense of responsibility for the Army as a profession, regardless of where they serve, and act on their responsibility to develop their subordinates as future leaders of the Army.

The key to this quote is the focus on mentorship. Senior leaders freely admit that mentorship is something that has deteriorated over the years due to money and time. It is usually unnecessary for mentors of leaders to have the same occupational or educational background as those they are coaching or counseling. Mentors have likely experienced what their protégés and mentees are currently experiencing, or are going to experience. This is where the ACG could provide the required expertise necessary to

coach and counsel. Consequently, mentoring relationships tend to be occupation and/or domain specific; with the mentor having proficiency in the particular areas they are assisting in, but without the requirement to have the same background.³⁸ Mentoring focuses primarily on developing a less experienced strategic leader for the future. The ACG would be a mandated provision for a longer term strategy created by the Department of Defense if adopted. Some commanders and leaders tend to frown upon such an endeavor due to the perception of micromanagement and may feel this type of mentorship is unnecessary. Superior leaders would most likely accept such mentorship and see it as another way to improve themselves, their organization and help them see the big picture. Toxic leaders are likely to argue that this is a distractor to their ability to lead and an intervention into their sense of trust as a commander. Over the last few months, the senior leadership has conducted an assessment in concert with input from leaders and service members. The ACG strategy combining their evaluation with the OER is one that can be united with the use of a multi-rater assessment that brings us to the second strategy within this paper.

Multi-Rater Assessments

The military is applying a commander's assessment tool called the 360-degree Multi-Source Assessment Feedback (MSAF) tool. Control measures such as 360 degree assessments, evaluations, and command climate surveys are currently in place to help leaders see themselves and their organizations with a sense of self-awareness. A tremendous result that occurs from these assessments is that it can help ensure toxic leaders are identified and removed if inappropriate behavior is identified. The assessment is developed to provide insight into a leader's attributes, personality, and interpersonal abilities related to strategic leader development.

The new policy change established by the military forces the rater to include a comment that the rated officer has completed or initiated a 360/Multi-Source Assessment Feedback within the last three years. The new evaluation report form will eventually have a yes/no box check for 360 assessment completion. The MSAF provides input from peers, superiors, and subordinates which will help the rated officer develop as a self-aware and adaptable leader. A recommendation would be to add in a ACG assessment into the 360 assessment to better inform the rater and senior rater with another set of eyes and perspective. Results of the feedback will still remain confidential and only be available to the rated officer and used for self-development not evaluative purposes. The purpose of the rater's check on the 360 assessment is to help ensure that leaders are encouraging subordinate development and that rated officers are benefitting from available leader development programs.³⁹ The leadership assessment and feedback process is not designed to highlight psychological maladjustment or character flaws. It simply describes the leader's characteristics on any number of traits and reflects certain consistencies and behavior patterns.⁴⁰

All agree with the implementation of these assessments, however, the Department of Defense should require the 360 assessment for evaluative purposes across all services. Furthermore, Department of Defense and personnel services directorates must enforce new amendments to these instruments to become more useful and effective. The problem with this assessment tool is that officers get to choose the soldiers, peers and superiors that they wish to evaluate their performance. The leadership effectiveness is thereby in question due to the creation of bias in the results. This bias can contribute to allowing the toxic leader to rise in positions of great

responsibility and affords them an out that prevents others from knowing that they might behave in a toxic manner. If a toxic leader completes the 360 assessment, he meets the requirement directed by the service component, but selects peers, subordinates, and superiors that already like their type of leadership style hiding the toxic leader in the end.

In a book called *Why Are We Bad at Picking Good Leaders?* By Jeffrey Cohn and Jay Moran, they conclude that organizations generally do a poor job of selecting leaders based on results versus potential and because they tend to select them on the basis of their charisma, achievements, experience, technical skills, level of confidence and ability to interview. They argue that organizations would do much better if they chose leaders that possessed, and exercised, seven "vital leadership attributes": integrity, empathy, emotional intelligence, vision, judgment, courage, and passion. Dedicating a chapter to each attribute, the book describes these seven qualities in detail and then offers practical suggestions on how to discern them in leadership candidates. The book concludes with a chapter that ultimately links leadership assessment, based on the attributes above, to leadership development. It offers practical advice, not only for developing other leaders, but also for personal leadership development.⁴¹ The 360 degree assessment could bridge the gap between the identification of toxicity and leader development if incorporated into the evaluation process properly and in a random nature.

We have seen several examples of commanders relieved and/or reprimanded for being toxic in recent articles and publications. These actions are intended to send a clear message to those that lead by intimidation and fear, that this type of behavior will

not be tolerated within the military, now or in the future.⁴² The 360 degree assessments are useful, but the adoption of new minor modifications will reduce or eliminate bias in order to help identify future potential toxic leaders. The military has made it clear that they want to root out toxic leaders and that they are working on making the Multi-Source Assessment and Feedback program more random. This randomness is only looked at for the future within a unit or organization. It is recommended that an outside agency or committee conduct these types of assessments looking internal and external to the organization to offer a better picture of the command climate developed by the officer in charge. Organizations and academia typically pay relatively little attention to toxic behavior and there are few tools available to evaluate such types of leadership qualities. Therefore, institutions shoulder the responsibility to develop new tools and to train and teach leaders to display what right and wrong looks like.

Although a new approach is recommended in modifying the 360 degree assessment, there really is no solid solution to eradicating toxic leadership. Leaders cannot solely rely on evidence-based valuations like surveys, assessments and questionnaires to solve this problem; it all comes down to leadership. Superior leadership, whether it is an officer, NCO, or civilian, prevails over toxicity. In the end it is left to the leader to act appropriately and set the example when in charge. This leads to the third approach for strategic leaders to consider in the course of reducing and eliminating toxic leadership within organizations is in academic institution reform.

Academic Institution Reform

Our academic institutions are the best in the world and are vital in teaching and shaping officers of the future. Modifying leader behavior starts with young officers in their attendance at academic institutions across TRADOC. The overall assumption in

this third approach begins with instruction by superior leaders within TRADOC.

Recommend the Department of Defense identify ways to increase opportunities and reward leaders serving in assignments outside the traditional Forces Command structure. Department of Defense should make assignments as faculty in academic institutions more attractive for those teaching. The military must be very careful to recruit and retain those non-toxic leaders who have the potential to succeed in today's and tomorrow's complex Joint, Interagency, Intergovernmental, and Multinational (JIIM) operating environments (i.e., institutional collectivism). The military should screen and select the very best and brightest officers with current deployment experience to send to assignments within TRADOC or military academies. This paper does not take the position that the instruction the military has now is not outstanding, it merely addresses the fact that TRADOC and military academies are not on the list of lucrative and attractive assignments for those great officers seeking to excel in the future. In order for this approach to be effective, leaders must have validation from the DoD and Human Resources Command that a TRADOC assignment is essential for future selection for promotion. Picking the non-toxic young leaders with the best talent will assist the military in reducing the potential of future leaders from exhibiting toxic behavior at senior levels.

Our top priority is to support and educate leaders focused on superior leadership and eliminate toxicity. DoD must think outside the box for academic purposes. They accomplish this by building more experienced leadership instruction to contribute to the effectiveness and readiness of our leaders now that the conflicts in the middle-east are subsiding. As the military moves forward in the 21st Century and the wars in

Afghanistan and Iraq conclude, more time will be needed to focus on leadership and the military as a Profession. In the classroom, leaders should be taught that they will be able to provide candid feedback to superiors and there is a need of more academic instruction on the topic of toxic leadership should be emphasized. The military can do better in balancing professional development taking a harder look at what limited blocks of time are allocated to the topic of superior and toxic leadership. Organizations and academia typically pay relatively little attention to toxic behavior. They pay an inordinate amount of attention towards positive leadership. Our academic institutions must expand leadership blocks of instruction to allocate more time for discussion of superior leadership characteristics and more importantly how to identify the characteristics and traits of toxic leadership.⁴³

Strategic leaders must have the interpersonal maturity to take responsibility for the development of the Army's future strategic leaders. These leaders must learn how to coach, teach, and mentor others while creating an environment where leaders may do the same. Interpersonal maturity includes the ability to ensure leader development does not get neglected in the pursuit of everyday mission accomplishment.⁴⁴ For example, the Vice Chief of Staff for the Army, General Chiarelli stated:

Our challenge over the next several years will be to maintain our combat edge at an appropriate tempo while reestablishing garrison systems to better care for our Soldiers. Unprecedented operational tempo has dictated that leaders remain primarily focused on preparing for their next deployment. As a result, enforcement of policies and leadership designated to ensure good order and discipline has atrophied. This, in turn, has led to an increasing population of Leaders who display high risk behavior which erodes the health of the force.⁴⁵

Department of Defense should start with the creation of better leader screening criteria for command selection boards to assist the military in identifying the right leader

for the right command. In terms of how leaders select, promote, and eliminate leaders, Human Resources Command and other service equivalent directorates could provide a better system to screen leaders prior to the convening of promotion and selection boards to eliminate toxicity. This screening tool would assist in further elimination or reduction of potential toxic leaders in conjunction with reviews of evaluation reports. This screening process nested with the addition of the ACG evaluations and 360 assessments will ultimately provide a better picture to senior leaders and their staffs prior to a promotion or command board's execution.

In addition, upon completion of boards, it would be beneficial to screen officers selected for promotion to assign them to culturally broadening experiences as an incentive to retention. For example, assigning combat veterans to civilian graduate school, fellowships, foreign country experiences, or doctoral programs would assist in creating younger strategic leaders for future positions earlier in their career tracks. Once completed these officers would be sent to academic institutions, military academies, and DoD level positions to coach, teach and mentor our future strategic leaders. Gerras, Wong and Allen all allude to this in their article on organizational culture.⁴⁶ In terms of role modeling by senior leaders and the use of stories about important people, senior leaders should communicate stories to their organization in which they highlight how a specific officer was selected for a critical position or rank based on his unique, career broadening experience (e.g., because they spoke Arabic or Chinese). Finally, and related to mechanisms to address assertiveness, senior leaders need to protect and reward (i.e., how leaders allocate rewards) mavericks and positive deviants who espouse thoughts outside the narrow mainstream of military normalcy. This paper

further recommends identifying the best non-toxic combat proven leaders with outstanding leadership qualities to become instructors in our academic institutions, to include an option to pursue graduate and PhD opportunities as an incentive to keep the superior leaders in the military.

Conclusion

In the end, actively working to better contain toxic leadership will have a tremendous beneficial impact for the joint force. The Department of Defense can decrease the prevalence of toxic behavior quickly if they deal aggressively with the problem. Superior leadership impacts the well-being, morale, and career success of every leader within an organization. Toxic leaders do not add value to the organizations they lead, even if the unit performs successfully on their watch. They do not engender high levels of confidence that lead to unit cohesion and esprit de corps.

The role of the leader is central to all military operations and character, charisma, and candor are the three key attributes in the human dimension of superior leadership. Service members must have trust and confidence in their superior leaders. Toxic leaders possess three major characteristics that all should avoid if noticed by subordinates. (These are not all inclusive and have been narrowed down for brevity purposes). Toxic leaders possess micromanagement traits & usually have a hidden agenda; they pretend that they value others opinions and ideas, and egos get in the way which results in abuse and mistreatment of people and things. These three characteristics directly and indirectly destroy organizations and eliminate trust. Once trust is violated, a leader becomes ineffective. Service members want to be proud of their units and their leadership. They might not report toxic leaders because nobody likes a snitch, but they expect professionals to perform to the best of their ability despite

a supervisor's leadership style. The military inculcates an attitude that one must respect the rank, even if one does not respect the person. Military culture esteems technical competence, and technical competence will lead some senior leaders to overlook flawed toxic leaders.⁴⁷ Whether the positive aspects outweigh the negative ones depends on five things; the needs of the organization at a particular point in time, the relative amounts of charisma versus mistreatment of others, how much the organization needs a charismatic leader, how much damage the organization suffers as a result of mistreatment of subordinates, and whether the leader is lucky enough to make the right decisions.⁴⁸

Therefore, the military must adopt an Advisory Committee of Generals (ACG) to assess, mentor, and evaluate military leaders. This program linked to the 360-degree assessment program will remove bias and help senior leaders identify the very best leaders and ultimately remove the toxic ones. Furthermore, Department of Defense, TRADOC and military academies currently allocate very limited time on the topic of leadership and very few incentives exist to bring the very best to our academic institutions. There doesn't seem to be great emphasis placed on toxic leadership behavior, characteristics, and symptoms in academic institutions. Compared to other blocks of instruction and the amount of hours allocated for instruction, leadership instruction continues to be the most limited. It will be more important than ever to increase the number of hours taught on toxic leadership. With the large numbers of leaders returning from combat operations who desire to teach and pursue higher level degrees, human resources command has an opportunity to change the system as it exists today.

The climate and culture of an organization must be a positive one and it starts with superior leadership. Key steps in fostering a culture of change begin with senior leaders avoiding aggressive, unethical, and inappropriate behavior. Leaders and subordinates must speak out against toxic and abusive leaders and must know that reprisal will not result. Thorough evaluation and training, obtaining unbiased 360-degree feedback administered by the ACG, randomly linking evaluations to the officer evaluation report, and increasing the opportunities rewarding instructors at our academic institutions will achieve a culture and climate of change across all services within the Department of Defense.⁴⁹

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